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DEFENSE OF CIA BY ZELNICK

SUSAN STAMBERG: At his news conference last night, President Ford supported secret use of the CIA to aid anti-Allende forces in Chile, but the President said we had no direct involvement in last year's bloody coup.

All Things Considered has been following the allegations of CIA involvement in Chile. Bob Zelnick joins us now with some notes on possibly contradictory testimony on the subject, testimony from various government officials. Bob?

BOB ZELNICK: At least two important congressional subcommittees were told by Director William Colby of covert CIA activities directed against the Marxist Chilean regime of Salvador Allende in the months immediately following the September 1973 Chilean coup, according to informed Capitol Hill sources.

Colby first briefed the House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs on October 11th, 1973. He appeared before the Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs on November 26th, 1973. On both occasions he told of CIA efforts to penetrate political organizations in Chile, to support anti-Allende demonstrations, to finance the opposition press and political groups, and to sabotage Allende's efforts to reach an accommodation with Washington in the wake of the nationalization of American-owned corporations operating in Chile.

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Details of Colby's secret House testimony were leaked to reporter Tad Szulc and published in the Washington Post on October 21st, 1973. Colby's appearance before the Senate subcommittee chaired by Gale McGee of Wyoming, a Democrat, was confirmed by my own sources today. In addition to McGee, senators attending the November 26th session included Democrats John Sparkman of Alabama, Stuart Symington of Missouri, and Edmund Muskie of Maine, and Republicans Clifford Case of New Jersey and James Pearson of Kansas.

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In addition, it was learned that CIA officials admitted conducting covert operations in Chile in testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Multinational Corporations before the coup occurred. It was further learned that former CIA Director Richard Helms also admitted Agency participation in such activities during confirmation hearings on his nomination for the Ambassadorship to Iran before the full Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

While sources say that Helms and other Administration officials may have been less than completely candid in portions of their committee testimony, it would be inaccurate to assume that key oversight committees were ignorant of the role of the CIA and what it was attempting to do in discrediting the Allende regime. At no time, the sources say, did anyone from the CIA or other government agencies acknowledge efforts designed to bring about the violent overthrow of the Allende government, only to undermine its capacity to govern effectively.

Thus while the full story of U.S. involvement is only beginning to emerge at this time, this much can be said. First, reasonably prudent members of key congressional committees knew or should have known of covert CIA operations against Salvador Allende, even before the bloody coup of September 1973.

Second, confirmation of such activities was provided by CIA Director Colby in the months immediately following the coup.

And third, it is only at this time, in the wake of new mass publicity, that key committee members are indicating shock and outrage.

This is Bob Zelnick.

STAMBERG: Bob, a few questions. First of all, what is it, a gentlemen's agreement up there that would prevent this story from having come out before?

ZELNICK: It's really tied in with the way Congress governs itself, and that is the key point that Mr. Colby made last week in his exchange with Michael Harrington. Congress establishes the ground rules. It says which committees oversee the CIA. It says how the testimony is to be handled. It governs the information provided by these committees to full committees, to other members of Congress. It governs the appropriation for the CIA. It is not necessarily a gentlemen's agreement, although it in effect works that way, due to Congress's own rules.

STAMBERG: The rules haven't changed. Why is the story suddenly being leaked?

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ZELNICK: I guess good reporters are getting on it. That's why it's being leaked.

STAMBERG: You don't think it's possibly selective leaks or anything like that?

ZELNICK: Well, I think what happened was a story that had been simmering for a good many months was published on the front page of the Washington Post and the New York Times on the same day. Members of Congress began reacting to it. To some extent, they may have forgotten the details. To some extent, they may not have been privy to the earlier information. And now others are also reacting, trying to get out their side of the story.

BOB EDWARDS: What is this, a face-saving effort on the part of Congress?

ZELNICK: Well, it seems that way. It seems that if Congress is generally interested in governing American covert operations, restricting them, limiting them, it can do so by appropriate internal regulations and procedures. That it has not done so makes these things very embarrassing to members of Congress, and when a major revelation occurs, what they try to say is "We were deceived," instead of "We knew it all along and didn't do a darn thing about it."

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